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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the problem solving process reveals at least three options: (1) finding the cause, (2) solving the problem, and (3) anticipating potential problems. These methods may be illustrated by examining "Oedipus Tyrannus," a play in which a king attempts to deal with a problem that appears to be beyond his ability to solve, and applying problem solving strategies to Oedipus's problems. Since the problem in the play is that the Greek city state of Thebes is being punished for the unresolved murder of the former king, Oedipus must find the murderer in order to lift the punishment. An outline of the appropriate problem solving process includes identifying the problem, considering possible causes, gathering information, analyzing the information, and finally finding the murderer. In addition to providing a set of circumstances for solving problems by locating the cause, the play also raises questions about personal values. It may be that questioning societal values in which universal problems were confronted was more important to Sophocles than simply solving a problem in the course of the plot of the play. (DF)

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KING OEDIPUS AND THE PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS

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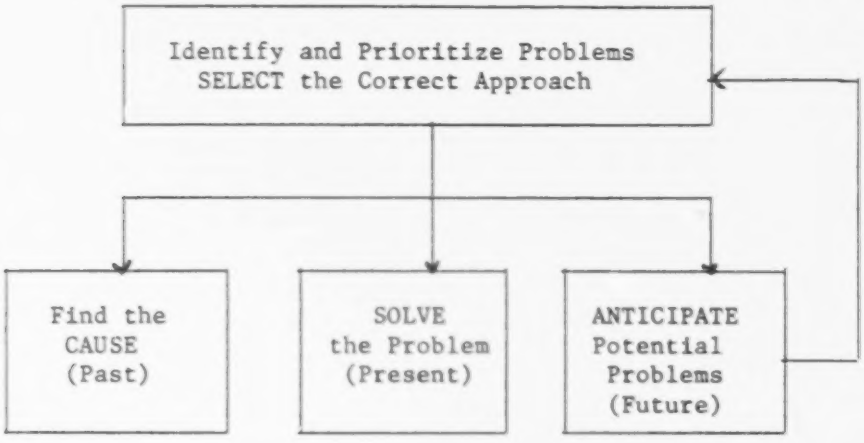
According to Wales and Nardi there are three options for solving a problem depending on circumstances. The procedure for "solving" in which necessary information can be accumulated without delving into the past is distinct from two other processes, "anticipating future problems" or "finding the cause." (Wales and Nardi, Chapter 2) The problem solver selects the appropriate procedure to fit the type of problem. The relationships of these processes is shown by the diagram below.


Identify and Prioritize Problems
SELECT the Correct Approach
Find the CAUSE (Past)
SOLVE the Problem (Present)
ANTICIPATE Potential Problems (Future)

Oedipus Tyrannus, the tragedy by Sophocles is an example of a dramatization in which a king copes with a problem seemingly beyond his ability to solve it. Following is an attempt to apply an established format for solving problems to the analysis of this classical drama. The purpose is to follow an outline for solving a problem to determine how it corresponds to the dramatic scheme in

the plot. If dramatists, in general, were unconcerned with offering solutions, this view provides insight into the role problem solving played in the actions of the story and how the solution functioned as an ironic paradox.

First, the problem is identified. The problem solver must be able to see the problem , perhaps as a 'people' problem or as a 'physical' problem. Then, out of a number of problems the key problem must be selected. Wales and Nardi explain that the CAUSE process is primarily concerned with THE answer to a WHY question. The problem solver looks for evidence which will reveal what in the Past caused this result. (Wales and Nardi, Chapter 4) The SOLVE process focuses on the present and becomes concerned with the answer to a HOW question. For example, how can the diseases in Thebes be reduced? ANTICIPATE is concerned with the future and an answer to a WHAT question. What, for example, new problems might be created by this solution?

In the case of Oedipus it seems apparent that Sophocles has his central character solve the problem by "finding the cause." This analysis follows the "cause process" outlined by Wales and Nardi and points out how problem solving relates to the dramatic scheme of the playwright. Finding the cause is concerned with things that have happened in the past. The following outline parallels the plot of Oedipus Tyrannus.

PROCESS FOR FINDING THE CAUSE

SITUATION: Thebes is plagued by disease, death, poor crops, barren women.

IDENTIFY PROBLEM: Unresolved murder. Former King Laius was murdered. The murderer has not been brought to justice.

GOAL: Oedipus will venge the city, find the murderer.

POSSIBLE CAUSES (Limited by Apollo): Concentrate on who is murderer.

GATHER INFORMATION (The immediate secondary sources are Senators, Priest, Creon):

Who is involved? Laius and attendants, murderer, or murderers.

What happened? Survivor rumored story of being attacked by band of robbers. It is said all but he were killed.

When? Many years ago before Oedipus' marriage to Jocasta.

Where? Away from the city of Thebes on road to a shrine.

How? Robbers slew Laius and party. Presumably by sword.

Why? Robbery was thought to be the motive.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: Apollo is a source of information regarding the nature of the problem. He is Phoebus Apollo, God of Truth.

GATHER INFORMATION:

Apollo through Creon	Senators	Tiresias, the Seer
Puts responsibility on Thebans.	Feel powerless.	Accuses Oedipus.

CONSTRAINTS:

1. Blindness is a point of contention.
2. Tiresias is at first unwilling to speak.
3. Oedipus is angered.
4. Creon is suspected of conspiracy.

GATHER MORE INFORMATION:

Creon	Jocasta
Confirms credibility of Tiresias.	Laius killed at junction of three roads.

VISUALIZATION:* Oedipus reflects on past incident at road junction. Remembers oracle predicting his murder of father, marriage to mother. Story was told to him by drunkard in Corinth.

CHOOSE: After visualizing scene in which he killed a man and his attendants who had tried to thrust him off the road and hit him over the head he compares testimonies from the witnesses so far and forms a hypothesis. If the facts are verified, he has been cursed by an evil Power.

Prediction: Chorus of Senators predict an evil death will result from disrespect of Gods. Note here that the problem solver does not make the prediciton.

ANALYSIS: Key witnesses are needed. Jocasta can bring witnesses forward. She thinks they will prove oracles proclaimed by Tiresias to be false.

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*Visualization was not originally a step in Successful Decision-Making by Wales and Nardi. It has since been added.

SYNTHESIS: Search plan is to interrogate Messenger and Herdsman. Jocasta and Oedipus ask questions. Jocasta refuses to continue after first answers. Oedipus continues.

Messenger	Herdsman
Who is he? Where from? What information? How can parentage be doubted? Why involved?	Who is he? Where did he meet Messenger? When? What did he do? Why did he get involved? How did the sequence come about?

EVALUATE THE SEARCH PLAN: From all the testimonies Oedipus concludes he himself is the cause. He has effectively discovered the truth.

CHECK THE RESULTS: Thebes is freed of curse. Oedipus' thoughts turn inward. He attempts to kill Jocasta, finds her hanging from rope. Blinds and banishes self. Curse on family is still in effect.

One can see that the process for "finding the cause" can be applied to the problem dramatized in Oedipus Tyrannus. It seems fairly consistent with the selected outline for solving the problem although the search for the cause is focused on Who rather than Why. Sophocles, the playwright, controlled the initial identification of the problem for thematic reasons and plotted necessary steps for Oedipus to follow in order to find the cause. The steps are both logical and necessary.

Sophocles wrote the play when he was seventy years old. Oedipus Tyrannus was written at a time when Athens was in a state of supremacy. It had an empire of client states over which it had loose control. Athens considered itself the most rational and civilized of existing city states and it was suspicious of Sparta, a city in rebellion. Athens had also experienced a real plague which was devastating and mysterious because there was no apparent cause, and moral ties of humanity were upset and in disorder. If Oedipus was meant to represent Athens, the people would have had great interest in the subject of this drama because it paralleled real problems in their society. (Cavender)

What is more difficult to assess with respect to problem solving and Oedipus Tyrannus is another aspect in the process, one that is not included in the outline for "finding the cause." That aspect has to do with values. Wales and Stager include three goals in their

conceptual view of decision-making and solving problems. One goal is "Knowledge of the facts and concepts developed by other people." The second goal is to be "Aware of the values, attitudes, beliefs and feelings of other people." The third goal is "Decision-Making." (Wales and Stager, p. 91) The end result of these goals is "Self-actualization," a state of being which produces the best kind of decision-making individuals.

Oedipus was portrayed as a "man of the mind," an intelligent human being who was capable of solving the riddle of the Sphinx as well as pursuing the problem of sterility in Thebes; Apollo was not only the God of Truth, but he represented light, intuition, and consciousness. (Cavender) In essence he represented the beliefs, feelings, and attitudes which played an important role in how the society solved its problems. One might assume that knowledge and values were equally important, that at least part of the implied meaning was a warning to Athens regarding the dangers inherent in tyranny, self reliance, and overreaching desires. The difficulty, however, in assessing values is in objectively determining the importance of implied meanings in the Greek political, religious, and mythological contexts. The larger issues brought out by the drama are concerned with universal conflicts: blindness vs sight, sickness vs health, conscious vs unconscious, fate vs free will, rational vs irrational. Dramatizing these themes gave contrast and dimension to the concrete

problem of finding the murderer of Laius. The title of the play itself has a double meaning. Not only is it the king's name, but Oedipus translated means "one who walks on two feet." And Tyrannus comes from the Greek word turannos meaning dictator, suspicious autocrat, paranoic ruler, tyrant.

By analyzing this classical tragedy in terms of problem solving one can see that the degree to which problem solving is achieved is manipulated carefully by the playwright not only to appeal to the intellect but to have an emotional effect, too. Solving the immediate problem revealed a much greater problem. The pattern of thinking was reasonable for solving the problem but the intent was not to offer a solution. The tragic effect is caused by the credible but ironic series of incidents.

Problem solving in this drama cannot be taken literally. The language and actions have double meanings and the outcome is paradoxical. What seems to be more important than literally solving the problem is that Sophocles intended to question societal values in which universal problems were confronted.

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